



What a Difference a Song Made (1934)

It was not until 1934 that the theme song received recognition for its creative impact in a film, whether musical or nonmusical. That year the Motion Picture Academy presented its first Oscar for Best Song. In the running were Vincent Youmans's "Carioca" (words by Gus Kahn and Edward Eliscu), Ralph Rainger's "Love in Bloom" (words by Leo Robin), and Cole Porter's "Night and Day" (from the film *The Gay Divorcée*). The award went to "The Continental" (music by Con Conrad; words by Herb Magidson), which was one of several songs written especially for *The Gay Divorcée*, the film title of the Broadway hit *Gay Divorce*. To the movie moguls, it was less unusual to refer to a divorcée as gay than to a gay divorce. (The current meaning of "gay" would put a totally different connotation to the play or film.) In fact, only "Night and Day" was retained from Cole Porter's original theatrical score. How inept can film producers be?

To say that the award to Con Conrad (1891–1938) came as a surprise is an understatement, considering the composers with whom he was competing. Conrad K. Dober, as he was christened on his birth in New York, was a theatre pianist who performed in vaudeville both in Europe and the United States. Before he went to Hollywood in 1929 to write movie musicals, he had scored three pop hits: "Margie" in 1920, "Barney Google" in 1923, and "Lonesome and Sorry" in 1926. Before he won the Oscar, he collaborated on "You Call It Madness But I Call It Love," whose co-writers included Gladys Du Bois, Paul Gregory, and Russ Columbo. Tragically short-lived

baritone Columbo, generally regarded as the first of the crooners, introduced the ballad and used it as his theme in the few years before his death in 1934. Conrad and Magidson produced only one other song of consequence after "The Continental." "Midnight in Paris" was introduced by Nino Martini in the film *Here's to Romance* in 1935.

At that year's Academy Awards, a Special Award was presented to Shirley Temple in grateful recognition of her outstanding contribution to screen entertainment during the year 1934. Shirley was five years old when she was discovered by Jay Corney, the composer of "Brother Can You Spare a Dime?," in the lobby of a Los Angeles movie house during the Christmas holidays. Corney persuaded Lew Brown, who was writing songs and producing films for Fox, to give her a screen test. She was so cute and displayed such charming savvy as a singer and dancer that she was immediately put under contract. Making her film debut in *Stand Up and Cheer*, she elicited such cheers from the audience that within the year she appeared in *Little Miss Marker*, stealing the film from stars Adolphe Menjou and Charles Bickford. Shirley's next triumphs were in *Baby Take a Bow*; *Now and Forever*, sharing billing with Gary Cooper and Carole Lombard; and *Bright Eyes*. She was then six years old.

Herb Magidson (1906-1986), the lyric writer of "The Continental," was educated at the University of Pittsburgh and worked for a New York publisher before he entrained for Hollywood in the 1929 California Gold Rush. Apart from the songs he wrote with Con Conrad, his biggest hit was "Music, Maestro, Please!," which made No. 1 on *Your Hit Parade* for four weeks in 1938 and became the No. 2 sheet music best-seller. His only other consequential song was "Enjoy Yourself (It's Later Than You Think)," a rhythm ballad with music by Carl Sigman. Although it was published in 1948, it did not become a hit until two years later when Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians made a best-selling disk on Decca.

Cole Porter may not have won the Oscar for his great standard "Night and Day," but in 1934 he had the biggest musical show of the year—*Anything Goes*. "It was more than just the runaway smash of the year," Gerald Bordman has observed. "More than merely a well-wrought, hilarious musical filled with unforgettable melodies and sophisticated lyrics, it was the quintessential musical comedy of the thirties." Out of its brilliant score came such timeless hits as the title tune, "Blow, Gabriel, Blow," "All Through the Night," "I Get a Kick Out of You," and a plethora of tricky and contemporary images in "You're the Top."

The public's taste for upscale sophistication was more than balanced or countered by a feeling for songs of a western character. One of the year's big

hits was "Tumbling Tumbleweeds," written by Bob Nolan, a Canadian who became fascinated with the West after he settled in Arizona. Nolan was part of a group organized in 1934, known as the Sons of the Pioneers. It was led by Roy (Cincinnati-born) Rogers, and included Tim Spencer, who grew up in Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. In 1935, the group acquired fiddler Hugh Farr and began performing on Station KFWB in Los Angeles, attaining enough popularity to make appearances with Will Rogers and at the Texas Centennial.

The initial recording of "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" was by the Sons of the Pioneers, but the best-selling version was produced by Bing Crosby in 1940. Gene Autry (b. 1907, Tioga Springs, Texas) introduced it in his first full-length film, *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* (Republic, 1935), and revived it in *Don't Fence Me In* (1945). Rogers sang it in *Silver Spurs* (Republic, 1943), as did the Sons of the Pioneers in *Hollywood Canteen* (Warner Bros., 1945).

In 1934, ASCAP made an award of \$2,000 for the best popular song of the year. The prize went to "Solitude" by Duke Ellington, words by Eddie De Lange and Irving Mills. This was Ellington's first hit song and was popularized by him and his orchestra on an RCA Victor recording made in 1933. Ellington was a master at using the blues idiom in a unique way for the expression of different moods—in this instance, loneliness.

The lure and romance of the sea produced a number of hits in 1934. "Isle of Capri" was an English import, a tango with music by Will Grosz and words by Jimmy Kennedy, the British lyricist for whom it initiated a series of hits. It was introduced in the United States by Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians, but the first American recording was by Xavier Cugat and His Orchestra. Extensive performances and other recordings resulted in a sale of a million copies of sheet music. In 1935, jazz trumpeter Wingy Manone—the nickname referred to the loss of his right arm in a New Orleans streetcar accident when he was a youngster—cut a scattin'-jazzy disk that became a request number for him and a standard in the jazz field. Also in 1935, "Isle of Capri" was included in the *Provincetown Follies* stage show. The *Follies* also featured another Kennedy maritime opus, "Red Sails in the Sunset." The composer was also Will Grosz, using the pseudonym Hugh Williams. It was introduced in the United States by Ray Noble and His Orchestra, reportedly aggregating a sale of over a million song sheets. "Harbor Lights" by the same team was a torch song—she was on the ship and he was on the shore—that became a best-selling record for Rudy Vallee in 1937. The song did not attain its majority until a dozen years later, when it was revived by Sammy Kaye and His Orchestra and by Dinah Washington. Then in 1950 it went to the top of the charts, appeared twenty-nine times on *Your Hit Parade*,

and sold over a million copies of sheet music. The universal quality of the song received special emphasis when a famous group, the Platters, recorded it and made a best-selling disk in 1960.

There is no indication that Jimmy Kennedy and his collaborator Michael Carr spent time in Mexico. But when Gene Autry toured England, he sang their song "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)" and then went on to make a motion picture with that title (Republic, 1939). Autry's disk sold three million copies in two years. But Shep Fields and His Rippling Rhythm also had a successful version of the Latin ballad. Toward the end of 1939 the song made No. 1 on *Your Hit Parade*, holding the slot for five weeks, and finished the year as the top ranking sheet music seller.

Jimmy Kennedy continued to produce hits into the Fifties: "My Prayer" in 1939, "April in Portugal" and "Istanbul" in 1953. "My Prayer," adapted by Kennedy from a classical French composition, "Avant de Mourir" by Georges Boulanger, was on *Your Hit Parade* for fourteen weeks, climbing to the No. 2 spot. Sammy Kaye and His Orchestra had the recording that increased the song's popularity. Once again, the Platters made a recording during the early rock era that sold over a million in 1956. It was still a Platters hit time forty years later, notably in Las Vegas, of all places.

Originating in 1947 as a Portuguese song, "Coimbra" by Paul Ferrao, "April in Portugal" acquired its English title when Chappell Music retained Kennedy to adapt it. Before it acquired its popular form it was known as "The Whispering Serenade" and was introduced by Georgia Carr on a Capitol recording. It became a hit in 1953 as "April in Portugal" on an instrumental recording.

"Istanbul" was a novelty song whose subtitle was "Not Constantinople." The music was by Nat Simon and the hit recording was by a robust-voiced group known as the Four Lads. The year was 1953, and it was Kennedy's last hit.

In an almost twenty-five-year collaboration, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart wrote only one song that became a hit without being part of a stage or film production. "Blue Moon" began by being called "My Prayer." Dropped from the Jean Harlow production for which it was intended, it was recast as "The Bad in Every Man" and sung by Shirley Ross in the nonmusical film *Manhattan Melodrama*. It was then briefly known as "Act One" and finally became known as "Blue Moon." As such, it was published by Robbins Music as an independent number, achieving the largest sheet music sale of any Rodgers and Hart song until then. Between 1948 and 1963, it was tracked in six motion pictures: *Words and Music* (MGM, 1948), *Malaya* (MGM, 1949), *East Side, West Side* (MGM, 1950), *With a Song in My Heart* (20th Century-Fox, 1952), *Rogue Cop* (MGM, 1954), and Federico Fellini's *S ½*

(1963). Except for the Fellini opus, every production was by the film company that owned Robbins Music. (20th Century-Fox was an adjunct of the combine that owned what was then known as the Big Three: Robbins, Feist, and Miller.) Curiously, the only recording of "Blue Moon" that reportedly passed the million mark was one made, inconceivable as it may appear, in the rock era by Elvis Presley.

Stanley Adams's role as President of ASCAP overshadowed his efforts as a songwriter. However, in 1934 he translated into English the Spanish song "Cuando Vuelva a Tu Lado" by Maria Grever. He titled it "What a Diff'rence a Day Made." It was widely performed and became a favorite of many female vocalists. But not until almost a quarter of a century later did it become a hit. Simply to say that it was then recorded by the salty-sweet voice of Dinah Washington and garnered enough disk jockey play to skyrocket the charts does not tell the real story.

Dinah Washington was a masterful singer who could handle any type of song from rhythm and blues to sophisticated white ballads. The Mercury label used her to cover for black record-buyers songs that broke as hits in other areas: country, pop, show music, jazz, and so on. When Mercury appointed Clyde Otis as its A&R chieftain—the first black in such an administrative post—I approached him about recording "What a Diff'rence a Day Made" with Dinah. Edward B. Marks Music Corporation, of which I was then General Professional Manager, owned the song's copyright. Dinah made a great recording, requiring only two takes. I was so convinced that her record could cross over that, even though I employed people to contact disk jockeys in key cities, I decided to personally promote the disk. I had no difficulty in persuading deejays at the major white stations to spin her record. But then I discovered that the Mercury promotion department was not backing my efforts—they were concentrating their promotion efforts on a number of major white artists, knowing that Dinah would sell 25,000 or more among black buyers. So it became a competitive battle, with Mercury contacting disk jockeys I had seen and reminding them that the Dinah Washington was not one of their plug platters. But Dinah's disk, once it was heard, had such tremendous appeal it overwhelmed the platter spinners and garnered repeat plays. And so the record broke for a hit as I was completing an itinerary that took me cross-country from New York to San Francisco, down the California coast, across the Gulf states, and ended in Miami, where Mercury announced at a disc jockey convention that Dinah had a pop hit—and, of course, made no reference to its efforts to sabotage my promotional activity.

"What a Diff'rence a Day Makes"—the tense was changed on Dinah's disk—received a Grammy as the best rhythm and blues record of the year. That was a slight misnomer, since it was a pop, not an R&B, disk. Dinah

followed her Grammy winner with a version of "Unforgettable"—and pop publishers were suddenly lining up in the hope of securing a Dinah Washington disk. The color line had been crossed.

In 1934, two new powerful media of song exploitation entered the music scene. The first, as we have already noted, was adding an award for Best Song to the Oscars given annually by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. This enhanced the importance of popular songs, prompting songwriters to extend themselves and film producers to search for memorable theme songs as potential hits. Being nominated augmented the value of a song, and winning the Oscar extended the life and increased the earnings of a song and film.

The second new medium of song exploitation was the legit dinner or jazz club, which sprang up in impressive numbers, especially on West 52nd Street in mid-Manhattan. Creating a venue for small groups and soloists—largely because of their limited size—the 52nd Street clubs were more important in the development of jazz as an art form than the big bands through which many of the jazz artists earned their livelihood. The small club and group was for *listening*, not for dancing, and moved artists to extend themselves. On 52nd Street, jazz was largely a solo art form.

Stanley Adams (1917-1989)

Born August 14, 1917, in New York City, Stanley Adams attended New York University and earned an L.L.B. degree at its law school. His first professional songwriting assignment was producing lyrics for a revue at the Connie's Inn night club in the early thirties. He wrote songs for films and Broadway musicals. After serving on ASCAP's Board of Directors as a writer-member he was elected president in 1953 and served until 1956, was re-elected in 1959 and served until 1980. The recipient of many awards, he received a Presidential Citation in 1963.

Interview with Stanley Adams

1954 was a good year for me. I did the English lyrics for two Latin songs. "My Shawl" was originally known as "Ombo" in Spanish. It had music by Xavier Cugat, who made "My Shawl" his theme. "What a Difference a Day Made" came from Mexico, where it was known as "Cuando Vuelva a Tu Lado," with Spanish words and music by Maria Grever, who wrote a number of hits that made it in the USA, including "Ti-Pi-Tin." You know what a hit "Difference" became when it was revived in 1959 since you secured the recording by Dinah Washington when you were Professional Manager at E. B.

Marks. It had a second revival in 1976 when Esther Philips's record became No. 1.

Talking about revivals, let me tell you about a recent revival—one that came out of left field, as music men used to say. In 1938, I wrote a song with Hoagy Carmichael for a Paramount picture that had Louis Armstrong and Mae West, who was wonderful to work with—just marvelous. The picture was called *Every Day's a Holiday*, and the song, titled "Jubilee," was introduced by Armstrong. Very cute picture. Nothing happened to another song I wrote that year called "Wacky Dust." But its revival is worth a story.

Hoagy Carmichael, with whom I wrote "Jubilee," remained on the coast. I came back to New York at the behest of the Shuberts to do a *Ziegfeld Follies*. They had bought the title and asked me whether I would be interested in working on it with Dana Suesse. We had just started to work when it was called off. At this point Henry Spitzer, who was Max Dreyfus's Professional Manager at Harms, called me and asked me to do some songs with Oscar Levant. Oscar was a fantastic musician, and he knew Bunny Berigan, the jazz trumpeter, very well. Bunny asked us to write a theme song. The result was "Wacky Dust," meaning music for a hot cornet—the music was so crazy. For example, "It brings a dancing jag, and when it starts, only a sap'll refuse the Big Apple and Shag." The Big Apple and Shag were big dances of the day. Bunny recorded it, but did not use it as his theme. Ella Fitzgerald also cut it. And that's where the song ended.

About four years ago I got a call from Robbins Music, telling me that the group the Manhattan Transfer had recorded the song in London and that it had broken for a tremendous hit in Europe. It was in an album. But they took it out and released it as a single. When the album was released in this country, they did not use "Wacky Dust" as a single.

I started getting letters about the song's relation to the drug culture. The song was interpreted—misinterpreted—because of the word "dust." Naturally I resented this implication. Not too long ago, I was listening to Steve Allen, and he picked the title up to show that "angel dust" was in the air way back in the thirties. When I wrote him a letter, he corrected the impression he had given on the air. In any event, it's another proof of the fact that no one knows when a copyright is going to be picked up and revived.

I did try to find out how the Manhattan Transfer latched onto the song, and I was told that they were going over some old albums—probably Ella Fitzgerald—and were attracted by it. They did a marvelous vocal. Oh, when I wrote Steve, I pointed out that "Wacky Dust" had no more to do with drugs than did "Star Dust."

"Yesterthoughts" was an old Victor Herbert tune. Herman Starr of Warner Bros. Music gave me that tune to write up. We were in the middle of the ASCAP-BMI situation, when ASCAP songs were off the air. There was no

contract between ASCAP and the networks, and all ASCAP songs were "booted." "Shadows on the Sand" endured the same fate. The music was by Will Grosz, who was very hot for a short time.

I did have a big hit in '42, which is somewhat outside the scope of your narrative. But it has an interesting story. George Meyer and I made an appointment to do some writing at the offices of Rocco Vocco. During the afternoon, George came up with that marvelous front phrase of the song that became known as "There Are Such Things." It was one of the few times that I wrote the lyric first and the music was put to it. While we were going over it, rehearsing it, Rocco came rushing in. After we played it for him, he said, "You wait right here." He called upstairs to the penthouse of the Brill Building, where Tommy Dorsey had his offices. Bregman, Rocco, and Conn were on the eight or ninth floor—and he arranged for Dorsey to hear the song the following day.

When we played the song for Tommy, he flipped. "It's everything you said it was," he said to Rocco, "but I'm going to publish it, not you." Instead of resisting, Rocco readily agreed, for he had a wonderful insurance policy for the future. After that, Tommy would have to play whatever Rocco brought him. That's how Dorsey happened to get the song. It was published by him. I believe that this was a Tuesday—and the musicians were going on strike the following week. So Tommy had to get it arranged and recorded before then. And he did, using the Pied Pipers and Frank Sinatra on the vocal. It was an enormous record, and the song was a smash. But Rocco had no way of refusing to let it go to Dorsey.

I just thought of another song of mine that developed unexpectedly into a hit. In a revue called *The Show Is On*, with a score by Vernon Duke and Ted Fetter, Hoagy Carmichael and I had one song. It was called "Little Old Lady," and, during the out-of-town run, the producer decided to dispense with it. But Yip Harburg liked the song so much that he wrote a special sketch for it in which a little old lady sold flowers at a stage door to the chorus girls. It was not supposed to be one of the show's major songs, but it had great charm. Guy Lombardo liked it as much as Yip Harburg, and he played it on his Sunday night, coast-to-coast show. It was like magic. Within a few days, calls came in from all over the country. In those days, song hits sold sheet music, and, before long, this little old song had amassed a sale of three-quarters of a million.

In the thirties—by comparison with the music business of today—there was a warmth, a camaraderie, an intimacy that have completely disappeared. The publishers and writers were very close; they mixed socially as well as being business acquaintances. We used to meet after hours at Lindy's, and the band leaders would drop in. It all had a feeling of family. Guys would often throw lines to other writers. It was a wonderful, wonderful feeling. In

those days, most of the publishers owned their own business—Saul Bornstein, Jack Bregman, Max Dreyfus, and the others.

Today, the companies are in the hands of business interests who bought out the original owners. An entirely different psychology has developed. A songwriter has to offer something more than just a song to interest a publisher. And then the groups came in. The ordinary songwriter is out because the groups write their own songs, record them, plug, perform, and publish them.

There's no market for songwriters like myself today. But for that matter, there aren't too many songwriters of the thirties still around. Johnny Mercer is gone, Hoagy Carmichael, Eddie Heyman, Jerry Livingston, Walter Donaldson, Gus Kahn, DeSylva, Brown, and Henderson, Harold Arlen, Arthur Schwartz, and so many more. And a number who are still alive have been incapacitated by illness. But their songs and the memories that go with them live on.

Medley 1934

In January 1934, the No. 1 comedy-variety show in radio was Eddie Cantor and Rubinoff's Orchestra, followed by the Maxwell House Show, with Lanny Ross, and Don Voorhees's Orchestra, with Rudy Vallee and his Fleischmann Hour in the No. 3 spot.

First use of the word "jitterbug" occurred in a song with that title by Irving Mills and Cab Calloway, whose band introduced the song.

Lawrence Welk (1903-1992), born in Sharsburg, N.D., burst on the music scene with "Beer Barrel Polka," initiating a long-lived career on radio and TV.

Muzak, now sixty years old and sent by satellite to more than 110,000 businesses and syndicated to seventeen countries, began its service in 1934 in Cleveland, piping music into homes through telephone lines.

Described as the most glamorous, luxurious, and, at more than \$20 million, the most expensive restaurant ever built in the United States, the Rainbow Room, sixty-five stories above Sixth Avenue, first opened its doors on October 3, 1934. Noël Coward and Cole Porter were part of the sophisticated café society that clinked glasses at the opening, a glittering realization of a project launched by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in 1932 to express his confidence in the American economy.

A search for antecedents turns up this early use of the phrase "Rock and Roll" in an issue of *Song Hit Folio* for December 26, 1934. It is the title of a song by Sidney Clare and Richard A. Whiting, publishing by Irving Berlin, Inc., for the film *Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round*. The reference in the title and song is to the "rock and roll of the sea" and the romance in the motion.

Paul Whiteman recorded nine sessions at Victor, cutting over forty sides to surpass the output of all other bands, including Rudy Vallee, who was at the height of his popularity. Among the more impressive disks were "Deep Purple," augmented by Dana Suesse, whose popularity promoted the addition of a lyric by Mitchell Parish; "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and "Wagon Wheels," which hit best-seller charts during a viciously cold New York spell with temperatures dropping to 18 degrees below zero; and a 12-inch version of songs from Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*—a kind of cast album.

The Paul Whiteman scholarship competition was awarded on June 13, 1934, to David Diamond, a nineteen-year-old poverty-stricken student of modernist Roger Sessions, for his *Sinfonietta*, a 20-minute work inspired by Carl Sandburg's epic poem "Good Morning America." The monetary scholarship came to Diamond at a time when he was mopping floors at the Dalcroze Institute, which he attended eight hours a day, and working at a drugstore at 96th and Broadway from 10:30 P.M. to 3:00 A.M. every night. *Sinfonietta* was premiered at Philadelphia's Robin Hood Dell in June 1935.

"One Night of Love," a semi-operatic theme song by Gus Kahn and Victor Schertzinger, was sung by the Metropolitan Opera Company's Grace Moore in the film of the same name. The audience reaction was so strong that the door was opened for the film appearances of other operatic stars.

When the Hudson-De Lange Orchestra was playing at the Greystone Ballroom in Detroit, it was decided that the band needed a theme. Will Hudson composed an instrumental theme he called "Moonglow." Arriving in New York, he settled at Mills Music as a writer and arranger. Eddie De Lange, who had been a Phi Beta Kappa student at the University of Pennsylvania, added a lyric—and the ubiquitous Irving Mills became the third collaborator. When the Hudson-De Lange Orchestra played it at the Roadside Restaurant on Long Island, the piece became known as the "Sophisticated Swing" theme. It did not become a hit until 1936, when a counter-melody was written to it by George W. Dunning (lyric by Steve Allen), which was recorded by Morris Stoloff's Orchestra on Decca and was used as the theme of the nonmusical film *Picnic*.

Decca Records entered the recording scene in 1934, financed by British coin, developing into a major label with "The Music Goes 'Round and 'Round," a 52nd Street audience-rouser, as its first best-seller and Bing Crosby as the company's star attraction.

In 1934, novelist Dashiell Hammett was at the peak of his success, having completed *The Thin Man*, his fifth novel. He was also working in Hollywood, a recognized celebrity at MGM, the author of *The Maltese Falcon*. He lived twenty-six years longer, but his drinking lost him jobs and friends, his health

deteriorated, and he gambled away his money or gave it to anyone who begged—dying in debt.

The Quintette of the Hot Club de France, with jazz fiddler Stephane Grappelli and gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt, made its first recording in 1934.